

Villard Hall
University of Oregon
Eugene, Lane County
Oregon

HABS No. ORE-50

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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VILLARD HALL
University of Oregon

Eugene, Lane County, Oregon

ADDRESS: Northwest portion of the University of Oregon campus
OWNER: State of Oregon
OCCUPANT: University of Oregon
USE: Class Rooms

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Villard Hall was the second building of the University of Oregon. Its name perpetuates the gifts of Henry Villard to the University at a time of financial crisis. Architecturally, it is a distinguished example of the Second Empire style - chronologically somewhat late for its time. The designer, Warren H. Williams, was one of Oregon's most prominent practitioners and his noble, rather squat building for the University sums up much of the mansarded design of the 1870s and early 1880s. More elaborate than Dady Hall nearby, it is one of the few remaining academic buildings of this era at any western American campus. Dedicated in 1886, the building has suffered grievous interior revision but is exteriorly elegant.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

In the 1884-1885 catalogue of the University of Oregon a new building was announced: "one of the more pressing wants of the University was more room. This has been met, for the present, by the action of the last Legislature, which appropriated \$30,000 for a new building. This will probably be ready for occupancy in 1886". The cornerstone

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of the new building was laid on July 28, 1885, which ceremony was elaborately recorded in the newspaper of the day.¹ The architect, Warren Heywood Williams (born in New York City, February 9, 1844) was the principal designer of his time, after Piper, who had designed Deady Hall. "He had been the major architect of Portland for fifteen years when in 1885 the Board of Regents of the University of Oregon sought his services as architect for the second campus building. During May 1885, plans and specifications were finished, and bids were opened June 18. Construction commenced shortly thereafter...The foundation stones and brick were of local origin. The name of Henry Villard, railroad builder and benefactor of the University, was attached to the building." (Lee Nelson, "Architects of Oregon: Piper and Williams", p. 12) The building superintendent, Lord Nelson Roney, popularly called "Nels", was a colorful personality. He was noted as a builder of covered bridges in his earlier career (until about 1885), and then became the principal builder of public, commercial and religious architecture in the Eugene area until about 1905. It was he who designed and built the "finely decorated arch" used at the cornerstone laying ceremonies of July 28, 1885. Between 1886 and 1888, Roney was in partnership with W. H. Abrams, contractor of Villard Hall. Henry Villard sent the University a fine large oil portrait of himself by E. M. Bell, dated 1896, which now hangs in the main entrance hall of Villard Hall.

NOTE (Historical Information)

1. At 9:45, the north bound train with dignitaries arrived at Eugene City (as it was then called), and was met by the welcoming committee under the Masonic Grand Master. At 2:30, the Grand Lodge met at Rhinehart's Theater (sometimes spelled Rinehart's). By 2:40, the procession had formed, and after traversing the town, it proceeded to the northeast corner of the building, "Under a finely decorated Arch", and the ceremonies began - music, an invocation, etc., and finally the reading of the list of deposits, which was curious in the extreme. The first item is most immediately relevant: engrossed on parchment was "This stone was laid July 28, A.D. 1885 by the M. W. Grand Lodge, F and A.M. of Oregon...Architect W. H. Williams of Portland. Contractor, W. H. Abrams of Eugene. Superintendent, L. N. Roney of Eugene." Copies of the acts locating the University at Eugene, of the act appropriating money for this building, report of M. P. Deady as President of Board of Regents for years ending

PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS

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June 30, 1883 and 1884, copy of Henry Villard's gift of \$50,000 for an endowment fund, and a large photograph of the first building (later called Deady), were included. Also, such items as a fragment of Plymouth Rock, bark from California big trees, a gold specimen, a chip of marble from Girard College, etc. The stone was tested, bedded and consecrated. Then came an oration. The procession reformed and returned to the city. At 8:00, in the evening there was a reception at Rhinehart's Theater with dancing. See clipping file at Oregon Collection, University of Oregon Library (contemporary newspaper clippings, but undated); also, the Eugene Morning Register for July 26, 1925, reporting on the 40th anniversary of Villard Hall on July 28, 1925.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

Addresses:

Carson, Dr. Luella Clay. Address of dedication, 1926 (for Deady Hall), reprinted in its entirety in Old Oregon, December, 1926 (Vol. IX, No. 3) p. 9.

Books:

Sheldon, Henry D., History of the University of Oregon, Portland, Binford and Mort, 1940, p. 54.

Newspapers:

See clipping file at Oregon Collection, University of Oregon Library; many are undated.

Morning News (Eugene), October 9, 1932.

Periodicals:

Nelson, Lee H., "A Century of Oregon Covered Bridges", Oregon Historical Quarterly, June 1960 (Vol. LXI, No. 2), pp. 133-137.

Nelson, Lee H., "Architects of Oregon: Piper and Williams", The Call Number, Spring, 1959 (Vol. 20, No. 2), Eugene, Library of the University of Oregon, p. 12.

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Ross, Marion Dean, "Architecture in Oregon", Oregon Historical Quarterly, March, 1956 (Vol. LVII, No. 1), p. 59.
The West Shore, September, 1885, p. 260 and illustration p. 285.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Lee H. Nelson has given a general characterization of Villard Hall in "Architects of Oregon: Piper and Williams", p. 12: "Built just north of Deady Hall, the building is similar to but more sophisticated than Piper's design. Second Empire in style, and richer in its detailing, it has Williams usual plaster cementing (what the 19th century preferred to call "mastic") over brick, with molded lines of rustication...keystones, and heavily bracketed cornices. The mansard roof is enlivened with a tower at each corner, and surmounted with cast-iron cresting. Unlike Deady, there are no dormer windows in the mansard roof, but the towers were practical for housing water tanks. The foundation stones and the brick were of local origin."

As with Deady Hall, the interior of this noble structure has been completely revised - and with even more devastatingly ruinous effect.¹ The first floor has a little theater in its middle, which extends down into the basement (the room is on a north-south axis). The second floor has been divided horizontally into two levels, with complete destruction of any interior character at this floor. Exteriorly there have, fortunately, been few major changes. A new door permits entrance at the basement level on the south side, center. The worst affront to the once-proud isolation of the building is the University Theater joined directly to its west face - obliterating that face in any present view of the building and providing a most unsatisfactory compromise between so-called "practical necessity" and visual effect. The building is, like Deady, heavily mantled in ivy at present (1963).

The 1885-1886 catalogue of the University of Oregon gives the following dimensions: "It is made of brick, but has a concrete finish on the outside, and is one hundred fifteen feet in length, sixty-nine feet wide and two stories high above the basement."

The massing of the building, with its principal long faces west and east, is at right angles to Deady. The corner towers give a more solid, squat appearance to this structure, which is augmented by the strong horizontality of the pseudo-rustication. Again, as on Deady, it is the windows which are the principal articulating features. There are

three basic types used on Villard Hall. A simple semi-circular arched window is used on all faces of the building,² as well as on the pavilions at the first (main) level, with a rectangular, panelled section beneath the window proper. In the second story, there are two more elaborated window forms. Both are enclosed within tall, narrow wall recesses in the surface of the building. On the main block of the structure, on all faces (although with seven windows east and west to three on the north and south, and a central window of the east and west group in a salient section of the building over the main door and porches, manifesting a 1-3-1 rhythm), the windows proper are flanked by tall, slender pilasters with Corinthianesque capitals which "support" a strip molding running between each side of the wall recess. The pilasters (unfluted) are on square bases with panelled recesses of the same square shape. Framing each window recess, in series of three on each facade, are Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature (a garland motif ornaments the frieze) extending between end pavilions and central entrance salient, above which spring arches enclosing round windows. The windows on the second floor of the pavilions are more Mannerist. The window proper is framed with an "eared" architrave which runs down into scrolls at either side of the window's bottom. The whole window seems to sit on small vertical strips or "feet" (actually, part of a panelled section below the window). Above, over the "eared" frame, is a pediment with a keystone connecting it to the frame. The pediment is filled with crisp, foliate ornament around a convex boss.

The wooden porches, reached by seven steps on the east, have Ionic columns as supports (wooden Ionic pilasters beside the door), and a simple balustrade over the porch roof. At the roof level, there are modillions on each face of the main block of building, but modillions and bracket-extensions on the pavilions - just beneath the cornice (all of wood). Above the cornice, between the corner pavilions' roofs (technically called troncs des pyramides), with their sharp mansard shape, there was balustrading which erupted into pillars two times on each side of a central, semi-circular pediment on the west faces, and two times only on the north and south sides. These pillar-posts once supported wooden urns, which have long since disappeared, as has most of the balustrading except for a section on the north face. The iron cresting on all of the roof parts is still, however, intact. One feature which defies easy description is what might be called a "blind dormer" in the center of each east and west face, at the roof level. This is a wooden box which protrudes from the roof surface,

directly above the semi-circular pediment over the main building cornice. It would seem to have been intended to carry the name of the building, as it is essentially a framed surface (the side framing elements are curious, stubby pilasters; above is a broken pediment) with a space which would logically give the donor his due. This has apparently never been done, perhaps at Villard's own suggestion.

The entire building is made to look as if it were of scored stone, with unbroken horizontal lines on each story and pseudo-voussoirs around each window arch on the first story and on the corner windows of the second story - as well as on the salient window over the porches. Small oeil-de-boeuf windows (set into horizontal wooden panelling) in the lower part of the troncs des pyramides give the final Second Empire touches.

NOTES (Architectural Information)

1. The original interior disposition of rooms would seem to have been: four large classrooms on the first (main) floor, and an assembly hall on the second. The building originally housed the English and Latin departments of the University, and now is devoted to Speech and Drama; the University radio and TV stations are on the present third floor. This had been made into a dormitory for sixty male students in 1946, but was converted to the uses of a radio station in the early 1950s.

2. There were doors in the center of each north and south face at the first floor - but they had the same basic shape as the flanking windows. Only the north door survives.

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June 1964

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